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The start of a new calendar year will be greeted with the thrill of the annual Polar Bear Club's plunge into Lake Michigan and free taxi rides on New Year's Eve.

Hundreds of participants will run into the icy waters on the Port Washington beach front at the end of Jackson Street at 2 p.m. on Jan. 1.

"I think the No. 1 thing about it is the looks on people's faces. Whether you're a rookie or a veteran that's been doing it 20 years, you still get shocked the same and you still get that crazy look on your face," said Jon Crain, president of the Port Washington polar bear club.

Decked out in swimsuits or festive costumes, swimmers run, jump and splash in the frigid water, which is around 33 degrees.

Swimmers do not need to register to participate in the event.

"We just ask that you sign the books that we have out there and we ask that you go completely under," Crain said.

Nearly 250 people took part in the dip on Jan. 1, 2012, and Crain hopes even more people join in next week.

"I think the big thing is that it brings people together for a unique experience," he said.

Club members will be on the beach before hand to prep the area.

"We like to cut back the brush on the beach, so there's a nice area for people to go in. Hopefully we don't have to break through any ice," Crain said.

Newcomers are always welcome, but Crain recommends they do one thing.

"The biggest thing, I would say is make sure you have your warm clothes and towels ready when you come out. Going in isn't bad, but coming out is when you start to feel it," he said.

Once again, the Ozaukee County taxi will provide free rides on New Year's Eve from 9 p.m. Dec. 31 until 4 a.m. Jan. 1.

Rides will be given to anyone in Ozaukee County, free of charge.

Donations from MillerCoors, Columbia St. Mary's Hospital and Specialized Transport Services have helped the county recover all operating costs.

To arrange a ride, call (262) 238-TAXI or 284-TAXI (8294).